

A look at the Sooner I formation

THE SOONERS will use a new offense this season, the first complete break from that proud old relic, the Oklahoma Split T, now 20 years old. The once spectacularly successful formation which dominated collegiate football for more than a decade is at present as dead as the Notre Dame Box. The vaunted attack developed by Bud Wilkinson with its quick handoffs at the line of scrimmage, its brush blocking which opened quick holes for quick backs, and its sliding quarterback options has fallen victim to superior defenses, the ultimate fate of all offensive formations.

Defenses inevitably catch up with and adapt to offenses, and the precisioned vehicle used by Oklahoma teams under Wilkinson and Gomer Jones is no exception. The ex-

developed quickly, there is a time differential in the I, and blocking patterns form more slowly than the Split T's sudden strike.

Handoffs by the quarterback to the tailback (TB), who invariably carries the ball about 75 percent of the time on running plays, and the wingback (WB), are made considerably deeper in the backfield than in the T, allowing blocking to develop and cutting down on the possibility of fumbles.

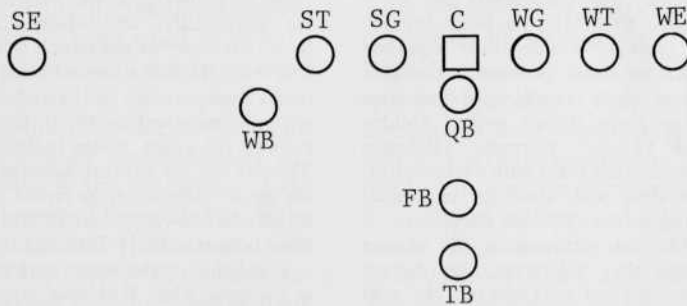
The wingback must be a fine runner with speed, ideally a breakaway threat in the Harry Jones mold, because he must cover a lot of ground in circling back toward the QB for his handoff or pitchout when he runs. He also should be an adept pass receiver, since his position puts him into the

are cut in half, simplifying the offense considerably. Distances are 3 feet between tackles and guards and also the weak side tackle and the weak side end, and 2 feet between the guards and center. The split end is out toward the wide side of the field about 17 yards, or a third of the playing field's width.

Distances in the backfield differ from the Split T. The tailback lines up $5\frac{1}{2}$ yards behind center and the fullback $3\frac{1}{2}$ yards, about the distance behind center of the three backs in the T. The wingback is 3 feet outside the strong side tackle.

Three receivers can move quickly into the wide side of the field in the I, and the Sooners will be using roll-out passes by the QB almost entirely. Like the Single Wing, the I uses a minimum of plays, which understandably can be polished because of the time thus available to lavish on them.

Coach Rice, the dark-haired Sooner aide, who seems slight in the presence of the youngsters he coaches, could be mistaken for a college professor as easily as a football coach. His past record is remarkable. As a high school coach he was 10-0, 20-1-1, and 71-8-6 at three schools, and during his tenure at Kentucky as offensive coach the Wildcats became downright fierce. Coach Rice is a highly intelligent strategist and tactician who is destined for a head coaching job someday. Under his direction the Oklahoma I is certain to be a superbly devised attack.



THE OKLAHOMA I FORMATION

plosiveness of the Split T could be checked by defenses which moved well laterally, and when offenses begin to cough and sputter, the coach with a strong instinct for survival retreats to the drawing board to devise new ways to get around, through, and over the defenders.

The systems in vogue today are the Winged T formation (balanced or unbalanced line is optional) and the I formation, both of which attempt to combine the best features of the pure T and the venerable, immortal Single Wing.

Credit for introduction of the I goes to Tom Nugent, who while at Maryland around 1960 began experimenting with a new alignment in which his three deep backs lined up behind his T quarterback, the four forming an I, perpendicular to the line. Other coaches have taken the I and developed variations, most notable among the early innovators being John McKay at Southern Cal, whose 1962 team displayed a praiseworthy grasp of the I's intricacies, going undefeated, winning the national championship, and beating Ron VanderKelen and Wisconsin in that memorable Rose Bowl scoring duel.

The Oklahoma version of the I as installed by Jim Mackenzie and his astute offensive coach, Homer Rice, contrasts most noticeably from the Split T in its alignment, but the difference in timing is the most important change. The I more closely resembles the Single Wing in the time it takes for its plays to form. Whereas Split T plays

secondary quickly. The fullback (FB) in the I is used chiefly as a blocker because of the excellent angle he has as he faces the defensive line, allowing him to trap or lead the interference on sweeps. The I can throw both the quarterback and fullback ahead of the tailback as blockers, permitting a strong off-tackle attack.

The blocking alignments in the I are also closely related to those of the Single Wing, with pulling guards and double-teaming. Positioning and spacing of the line doesn't differ from the offense used the past few years here. One change, however, is in the designation of the linemen. From left to right in the diagram is the split end (SE), strong side tackle, strong side guard, center, weak side guard, weak side tackle, and weak side end. The players who fill these positions line up on the left or right side of the center, depending on where the ball is in relation to the sideline. The strong side is always toward the wide side of the field with the wingback always aligned on this side.

The strong side is so designated because the defense must of necessity overshift toward the I's strong side to cover the split end and wingback. By enabling each lineman to play in the same situation—always on the strong side or always on the weak side—assignments

Coach Rice poses with Ron Shotts, who as tailback will be called on to carry the brunt of the ground game in the I formation.

